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Chapter 1: The Newcomers

Deathbringer soared over the NightWing village, checking that everything was working well. He smiled to think of how much better the NightWings were doing now that they weren't living in fear of the volcano – and that they had the best queen of all time ruling them.

A flash of white caught his eye. There, down in the village – an IceWing, accompanied by a SandWing, Moon and Kinkajou. *Highly* suspicious. And there was that thing about a rogue IceWing planning to assassinate Glory... and this IceWing *did* look very evil and plotting.

He dived, savoring the thrill of the chase. And then the thrill of the capture! And then the thrill of the interrogation! If he was that suspicious IceWing Glory was looking for after all, the IceWing plotting to assassinate his- his queen. And no one would ever kill Glory. *Ever.*

He saw Moonwatcher glance up just half a second before Deathbringer smashed into the IceWing. "No, stop!" she shouted. "He's not-" And then Deathbringer was shooting past, pinning the IceWing's wings and forearms with his star-speckled wings and pinning his back legs with his tail. With a forearm, he casually mashed the IceWing's face into the dirt and circled his claws around his opponent's neck. It had been a long time since he fought such a cold opponent, and it startled him for a moment.

"Don't bother struggling, IceWing," he said, slightly gleefully. He loved his new job. "You're under arrest."

This was not met with the reaction he expected.

"Stop it! Get off him!" shouted Moonwatcher, shoving at his side with no effect.

"He's on our side!" said Kinkajou, a little too loudly for Deathbringer's taste. "Or he was, before you *randomly attacked* him! Now he'll never like us again!"

A little muffled through the dirt, but still unnecessarily loud, the IceWing bellowed, "I wasn't going to anyway! I didn't like you before either! And I'm going to MURDER this NightWing!"

Deathbringer brought his head down so he could see this IceWing's face better. Then he turned to look at the assembled team of dragonets.

"I don't know, he sounds kind of murder-y, Kinkajou," he said reasonably. "And we heard there's an extra-dangerous IceWing on the loose right now, so I think I should stay here until further instructions."

"I'm instructing you!" Kinkajou yelped. "He's not the dangerous one! That's his sister!"

"It's true," added an unfamiliar SandWing with a scar across his snout. "This one is honorable. He's no sneak-in-the-dark assassin."

Now this was starting to get personal.

"Hey, ouch," he said, grinning. "Nothing wrong with assassins. Who said there was anything dishonorable about assassins? They're just not allowed to kill my—" he stumbled for a moment, then recovered magnificently; "My queen. It's my job to stop them and drop some violence on their heads, but I'm not *judging* them, sheesh."

"He's not here to kill Glory," Moon said. "If he were, he would tell you, and he'd challenge her in open combat."

Now *that* didn't comfort him at all. The IceWing looked thoughtful for a moment, and stopped struggling, which was a relief. Was Moonwatcher telling the truth? Open challenge didn't sound any better than assassination to him.

"DEATHBRINGER!" bellowed a dragon he knew, loud enough for the IceWing below him to vibrate. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" He felt his heart spread wings and soar when he heard Glory's voice,

but he quickly assembled a response.

"Saving you, protecting the forest, defending our new home, sitting on a very cold IceWing," said Deathbringer, grinning. "You know, the usual." The IceWing tried to wriggle out so he could see, but Deathbringer gently placed his face into the ground again. Murmurs started to ripple around the village.

"Stop arresting my guests," said Glory wearily, landing beside him and nodding at Kinkajou and Moonwatcher. "It's not romantic or heroic, it's annoying. I've told you this before."

"I know," Deathbringer said, aggrieved. "But look, it's an *IceWing*. Sunny specifically said there was an IceWing trying to kill all the prophecy dragonets. This is definitely a pin-first-questions-later sort of situation."

"All right, OFF," said Glory, heaving/rolling Deathbringer off the Potentially Dangerous IceWing. Deathbringer landed with a *thud* in the dirt, got up, and shook it off his wings. "I am going to replace you as my bodyguard if you seriously can't tell the difference between a male IceWing traveling with my friends Kinkajou and Moonwatcher, and a lone female IceWing out to kill me. Pay a little more attention to detail, Deathbringer. Also, by the way, you're one to talk about killing prophecy dragonets."

As soon as he was liberated from the claws of justice, the IceWing leapt up and whipped around to face Deathbringer, teeth bared. He was smaller than Deathbringer had thought, about the same size Glory was. The IceWing flung a beetle into the rainforest canopy, and proceeded to look like he was about to kill everyone here. He also looked like he would use the traditional fighting methods for the ice dragons.

Suddenly, the IceWing leapt towards Deathbringer, claws ready to fight and the hissing of frostbreath approaching. Deathbringer was caught in an iron gauntlet of freezing fear for a second, remembering all the horrible tales of Battlewinner. Was this how he died?

And then Glory was there, blocking his way with one wing and a

look of pure fury for one millisecond before it was gone, like the flares of orange and red in her scales. He grinned. She totally cared if he died or not!

Glory inclined her head in a small bow to the IceWing. "We are so honored to have Queen Glacier's nephew, Prince Winter, in our forest," she said. "I sincerely apologize for the outrageous behavior of my brain-dead bodyguard. You should have been escorted at once to my royal pavilion, not attacked in such a disrespectful manner."

Behind her back, Deathbringer grinned again.

"Everyone back to work, right now," she said to the crowd. To the IceWing's obvious surprise, they did, although a few moved slowly *on purpose* and some grumbled about it. Glory caught Winter's expression of amazement too, and frowned for a second.

This IceWing still looked like he wanted to kill Deathbringer, but maybe he had other things on his agenda, because he stood up and didn't kill *anyone*, which was a relief.

It was clear he still held a grudge, though. "Will he be punished?" he asked, casting a vengeful look at Deathbringer.

"Oh yes," said Glory, frowning at him too. He grinned and she gave him a look like, a*ct serious.*

He nodded and looked sorrowful to the best of his abilities.

"Creatively and firmly," said the queen of the RainWings and NightWings. Deathbringer picked an orange from a nearby tree and began to eat while trying heroically to retain his sorrowful look. He was pretty sure it worked.

Winter got up and walked alongside Glory. Moonwatcher said goodbye to her mother, and her and Kinkajou followed the two royals, who were walking along the forest floor. Qibli cast a look at Deathbringer that he couldn't interpret, then went after them. Deathbringer sighed, finished his orange, and followed.

Chapter 2: Icicle

Glory walked along the forest floor, talking to the Jade Winglet. Winter certainly wasn't being too friendly or open-minded after Deathbringer's idiotic – *but kind of sweet* – arrest. He was trailing behind them now, looking not repentant at *all*.

"So Sunny told us most of it, but I was hoping you could fill me in on the details,' she said to the group of dragonets.

"I can!" Kinkajou offered, bouncing up on Glory's right. "Winter's sister, Icicle, who is, like, wicked scary, by the way, was secretly conspiring with Queen Scarlet because it turns out Winter's brother is, like, actually alive, not dead like everyone thought, and Scarlet's totally got him locked up somewhere, so Icicle was going to kill Starflight to get him back, except then Moon and Qibli and Winter completely heroically stopped her and it was apparently amazing and I missed the whole thing! Can you believe it? And so then Icicle flew off and we figure she's coming here to kill you, so we're here to completely heroically stop her again and also find out what she knows so we can rescue Winter's brother ourselves. Also, hello, school is awesome, how are you?"

Glory frowned at the tiny, chipper RainWing. "You're in as much trouble as Deathbringer," she said sternly. "What were you thinking, leaving school without permission? When everyone was already in such a state? Do you know how worried Sunny and Clay have been?"

Kinkajou froze, with explosions of dark blue expanding across her scales. A thunderstruck expression came across her face. "Oh no!" she said, *actually* sorrowful, unlike a certain NightWing who was following with an intrigued expression.

Stop thinking about him. This is more important.

"Didn't Turtle tell you guys?" asked Qibli.

"Yes," Glory said sarcastically. "And that certainly helped. Good news: Four of your students have gone off to find a dragon who just tried to kill you, in order to find another dragon who has tried to kill you about ninety dozen times. Oh excellent, thanks, Turtle. Now we don't have to worry at all. I mean, we were hoping somebody would take care of the vengeful and deadly Queen Scarlet for us. Preferably a bunch of five-year-olds. Very reassuring indeed."

Moonwatcher oddly ducked her head for a moment. "Sorry, your Majesty," she said, also looking genuinely sorry. "This felt... urgent." She glanced sideways at Winter, who got a very odd expression on his face for a second.

"It *is* urgent!" Kinkajou burst in. "We think Icicle is coming here to kill you next!"

"That's what *I* said," offered Deathbringer, from the back of the procession, looking bemused. "Ahem, ahem."

Glory looked at Kinkajou, hoping it wasn't true. Not so much because there was a crazy assassin after her, but because Deathbringer wouldn't be forgetting that anytime soon. "Do you really think so?" she asked.

"Absolutely," said Qibli. "You're her only target left. I'd wager a month of lizards on it."

"That would be irritating," Glory said. "If Deathbringer turns out to be right, I mean. It makes him really insufferable." Behind her, Deathbringer grinned *again*. She wished he would stop doing that. It was very distracting.

"I am here to search for my sister," said Winter in a voice that sounded like he practiced it every day. "I just need to make sure that no one interferes while I do so." He cast a glare at Deathbringer, who put on a repentful face again in a split second.

"I think we can do better than *that*," said Glory. She looked around and tried to identify whose shimmering shadow was sitting on that tree branch. "Banana?"

"No, thanks," said Winter grumpily, but Kinkajou and Moonwatcher were also looking at it, guessing.

"Actually, it's Heliconia, your Majesty," said the RainWing, materializing out of thin air. Winter and Qibli looked startled – she guessed they had never seen RainWing camouflage before.

Glory flicked her tail. "Heliconia, please tell my scout captains to meet me at the pavilion as soon as possible."

Heliconia's scales began fading from pink to blue. 'But I can't leave you unguarded, your Majesty," she said sorrowfully.

"I think *seven* guards are quite sufficient," said Glory, waving her claws at the clearing boundaries, where the air slithered and flapped to keep up with them. "One might call it overkill, in fact. One might even infer that somebody doesn't think he can do his job properly on his own. Also that he must think I'm either blind and deaf or recently hit on the head, that I wouldn't notice the addition of five more dragons following me around." She cast a look over at Deathbringer.

"The whole point of a top secret invisible guard," Deathbringer said severely to Glory, his eyes gleaming, "is for them to be invisible and secret. Therefore it is extremely unhelpful for *certain queens* to go pointing them out and discussing them loudly with the entire rainforest."

Glory ignored him. "Go now," she said to Heliconia, who nodded and flapped away, disappearing into nothing as they went. She saw Winter looking grudgingly impressed as he tried desperately to spot the other six RainWings hidden in plain sight.
"The pavilion is a short flight this way," she said, nodding in the direction of the palace. Well, to call it a palace would be a little extravagant. More like a larger hut with a throne and everything. "I built it half way between both villages for anything official. Follow me."

She spread her wings and flew, feeling sunlight radiate off her every scale. Alongside her, Qibli and Kinkajou dodged and wove around the trees, although not very successfully. But the little NightWing

dragonet, Moonwatcher, was better than all of the rest of them combined – including her, she admitted grudgingly. She slipped between every obstacle with a talent Glory hadn't seen on any other dragon.

Winter was clearly thinking the same thing, but in a different way, judging by the way he kept on looking at her with something in his eyes that Glory recognized. Above them, Deathbringer soared, turning patches of sky into night with his star-specked wings. A black leather satchel was slung around his shoulder, like it always was. Glory smiled to herself. As heroically idiotic as Deathbringer could be, being near him always felt like sun-time to her. She had an idea that Winter felt the same about Moon.

Chapter 3: The Palace

From Winter's expression, the palace was not quite what he imagined.

It was a simple wooden pagoda, larger than the rest, sure, but not exactly laden with gold and diamonds. Glory climbed onto her platform and watched as the Jade Winglet assembled themselves in front of her. Deathbringer settled himself on the platform

"Now," she said, "I know who you all are, but let's officially meet anyway. I'm Glory, queen of the RainWings and the NightWings. My overenthusiastic bodyguard there is Deathbringer." He straightened and grinned at her. She smiled back and lifted a talon to the roof, where Silver was sleeping.

"And this is Silver," she said, letting the sloth slide down her arm and onto her shoulder, where it yawned and fell back asleep.

Qiblil murmured something to Winter, who frowned. "I'm Qibli, your Majesty. One of Queen Thorn's advisors."

"Welcome," said Glory. And then we have Moonwatcher, Kinkajou, and of course, Prince Winter." The IceWing prince shot a glare at Deathbringer, but nodded. "My friends will be very relieved that you're all safe. Jade Mountain is a bit of a mess right now, and it didn't help to have one entire winglet disappear."

"Sorry," Kinkajou said.

"Sorry," Moon agreed, looking down at her talons.

In the silence that followed, Glory looked at Qibli and Winter. Were they *not* sorry they had almost terrified her friends to death?

"Okay, sorry," said Qibli. "But seriously, Winter can't just look for Icicle and Hailstorm by himself."

Winter drew himself up. "Of course I can!" he said arrogantly. Glory

heard the metal contents of Deathbringer's satchel clink around as he resettled himself. "That's the entire plan. That's what I'm going to do." Suddenly he looked a little ill. Moonwatcher looked at him with a look that probably meant, *I'm going to help you no matter what.* Glory smiled to herself.

"Well, let's see. Here come my watchers," she said, flicking her tail. Deathbringer yelped and scooted back a few feet. She forgot he was there – he could be quiet when he wanted to.

Outside, a line of dragons were appearing seemingly out of nowhere. Six dragons formed some sort of weird shape that resembled a snake with several broken bones rather than a line. Winter frowned.

"I called you in to ask if any of you have seen any sign of an IceWing today," Queen Glory said, already knowing how this was going to go. "For those of you who don't remember the lessons, those are the white or blue dragons with spiked tails and cold scales."

The RainWing closest to her – Mango, she remembered – leaned towards her and whispered loudly, ""Your Majesty, I think there's one of them right behind me."

The dragon next to him looked around in alarm, spotted Winter, and leaped backward, nearly knocking one of her companions off the platform.

Chaos ensued, with RainWings yelping and poking Winter and undoing all the hard work Glory had done to make Winter feel like a valued royal so he wouldn't kill anyone. "Oh my gosh, is that what they look like?" "Why's it pointy all over?" "Look at its tail!" "It really is all spiky!" "And can you feel how cold it is? Whoa, that's so weird!" "Wait until I tell Dragonfruit! He'll love this!"

Glory closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "Have you *seen* any other IceWings?" she asked slowly. The RainWings all looked back at her.

"Would've noticed if I did!" one of them offered. "Look at how

sparkly he is, like raindrops on a cobweb or something."

"I'll say," agreed another. "Plus brrrr, I think I'd have woken up if something that cold went by me."

"Me too!" said a third.

Glory closed her eyes and thought for a moment about whether she should mention that sleeping on guard duty wasn't what they were aiming for here. Behind her, Deathbringer cleared his throat.

"Permission to check with the backup NightWing guards?" he asked, shaking out his wings. Glory nodded.

"Yes, yes, but make sure that if they *do* see an IceWing, they're to follow it, not attack it. Especially if they're by themselves."

Deathbringer bowed and flapped off, whistling.

"That means you too!" she shouted after him. "Keep your claws to yourself!"

"Can't hear you!" he called back merrily. Then he ducked sideways into the shadowy canopies and was gone in an instant. She sighed.

Chapter 4: Dead NightWings

"Knock knock!" said Deathbringer as he landed on the pavilion of the guardhouse. When there was no response, he said, "Knock-knock who's there!"

"Me," he admitted, "is the right answer."

The door opened on a sour NightWing face. Deathbringer recognized him as that grumpy one called Obsidian. The scar-faced NightWing assessed Deathbringer and shouted, "DARKCLAWS!"

Another, smaller NightWing came walking in. She carried a spear and also regarded Deathbringer with apparent distaste. "What do you want?" she snapped.

Deathbringer knew that a lot of NightWings disliked him for living in the rain village, but he didn't care. Most NightWings were grumpy anyway. Except for himself, of course. He was great.

"Message from Queen Glory," he said cheerfully. "She asks if you've seen any IceWings recently."

The guards shuffled grumpily. "No one," said Obsidian.

"Except for Startail," said Darkclaws. "He went hunting the other day and hasn't come back yet."

"Oh dear," said Deathbringer. He took off without saying goodbye, and hightailed it back to the pavilion.

Get it? He thought to himself. *High-TAILED it? Hahaha.* He grinned at his own pun and entered the palace, where he found no one except for Kinkajou.

"What!" he said. 'Where's Glory?"

"Out," said Kinkajou morosely. "Finding the IceWing."

"Winter?" asked Deathbringer. "Did he run away?"

"No," said Kinkajou, her scales a muted grey-blue. "Icicle."

"WHAT?" bellowed Deathbringer. Bolts of lime green surprise ricocheted off of Kinkajou's scales. "By *herself?"*

"Well, Moon and Winter went with her, if that's any relief."

It was not a relief.

Twenty minutes later, he heard the thumping of talons on the pavilion outside. He leapt up and accidentally ripped off a few flowers with his tail. Kinkajou jumped to her feet and shot over to the enterance, scales turning orange and purple.

"Did you find her? Uh-oh, Winter looks mad. Well, actually, that's how he always looks. Is he mad? What happened?" she asked hurriedly. Deathbringer's spirits brightened tremendously when he saw Glory come in, apparently unwounded, but *still.*

"*By yourself?"* he roared at Glory. "*With three dragonets to protect you?"*

"Excuse me," interjected the haughtiest Winter, "Dragons my age are seasonal warriors where I come from. We guard the queen all the time in the Ice Kingdom."

"Don't get your tail in a knot," said Glory, letting Silver climb up onto her shoulder again. "My top secret invisible guard was following us, and you know it."

"But *I* didn't," he said woefully. Glory rolled her eyes and gave him an exasperated look.

"You can't always be," she said in a quiet, affectionate voice. Deathbringer knew this was true, but he *didn't like it anyway.* "So calm down and trust me to take care of myself.

"Says the dragon who got chained up in a lava prison," muttered Deathbringer, but he let it go. Glory resettled herself on the stand and stamped out a few seeping spots of pink along her scales. "The

important thing is that we know the IceWing is here."

"She is?" Kinkajou squeaked. "Actually here? In the rainforest? Right this minute?"

Right this minute, thought Deathbringer. *Somewhere out there is an IceWing plotting to kill my queen.* He felt the chakrams in his satchel and patted them comfortably. It had been a long time since he was an assassin, but surely he could do it again, for Glory's sake.

Glory began to issue orders. "We need to organize teams to search, starting here and spreading outward. I also need you to come look at something for me." She brushed Deathbringer's tail with her own, and he smiled. "We need to identify the NightWing Icicle killed."

Well, that put a damper on things.

"As for you all," Glory said, turning to Winter and Moon and Qibli and Kinkajou, "I think the safest place is the dragonet wingery. It's not far, it's already well-fortified, and I'll double the guard to protect you."

"What?" Winter cried, flaring his wings in an entirely overpanicked flare. "You can't lock us up with a bunch of new-hatched dragonets! I need to look for my sister!"

Glory shook her head, and Deathbringer nodded too, amused. "I'm sorry, Winter. But if anything happens to you, the IceWings will declare war on us, and I wouldn't blame them. Keeping you safe is the most important thing." She thought for a moment. "I promise to let you speak with her when we find her."

"Unless an overzealous NightWing kills her first!" Winter shouted, with a glance at Deathbringer. The IceWing lashed his tail furiously. "You can't promise me you'll keep her alive! I know how NightWings are — they'll kill her the moment they see her!"

Unfair, thought Deathbringer. *Wait... okay, yes, fair. Am I overzealous? I have no idea what that even means.*

"I am their queen," Glory said with steely ferocity, "and I will not let them do that."

"She's my sister!" Winter roared, leaping to his feet. Deathbringer quietly tensed to block Winter's path.

"Exactly!" Glory snapped back. "So you're in danger from her and from the entire tribe of NightWings, once they find out what she did! I'm not having any more dead dragons in my rainforest today."

Qibli grabbed Winter by the shoulder and whispered something through his teeth. Deathbringer strained to hear what it was. Something *conspiratorial,* maybe, he guessed. Moon nodded to confirm something, then glanced over at Deathbringer and Glory.

Winter looked like he was about to break his brain from overthinking. Finally he sighed, sending a little invisible plume of frostbreath into the air.

"Very well," he said slowly, grinding his teeth. "Take me to the hatchery."

Glory looked at a spot on the wall and called, "Heliconia?"

"Right!" said Heliconia, materializing out of the wall. Deathbringer still was a little unsettled whenever that happened.

"Take them to the wingery," said Glory.

Chapter 5: The Investigation

Glory wove through the trees, trying to not hear the incredibly loud crashing noises from Deathbringer, who was paced a few wingbeats behind. Seriously, the NightWing could not sneak here – not that he would have had any reason to when he was trained, she thought. NightWings never had any reason to assassinate RainWings – until her, of course.

"There!" she called to him. "The bunyan tree." She circled around and landed at the foot of the beautiful tree, the roots entangled in each other, sloths poking their furry faces out of crevices and holes in the magnificent plant.

The whole effect was slightly ruined by Deathbringer's great big galumphing wings as he crash-landed into the meadow, sending several sloths swinging away in an alarmed manner. The NightWing assassin groaned and got to his feet, looking around.

"The IceWing suspect-" he began, switching to investigation mode.

"Icicle," said Glory.

"-Icicle," he said, with barely a break in his stride, "killed someone *here?"*

"Well, what did you expect?" asked Glory.

"I don't know," he said, with a puzzled expression. "Somewhere more dark and foreboding?" He poked at a yellow flower and frowned, apparently displeased with its unevilness.

"Well then," said Glory. "Why don't we go investiage to somewhere more ominous? Just ignore that trail of frostbreath and the undug body ravaged by serrated claws. No big deal, probably nothing."

Deathbringer flicked his tail at her and she jumped back, grinning.

"I didn't see that, did I?" he asked ruefully. "It looks a lot more evil *now."*

Glory went over to the body, and dragged it back into the meadow by its tail. "Anything to report?" she asked.

Deathbringer leaned over the body and examined it with a serious expression. "It seems," he said slowly, "that he was killed by – you'll never believe this –" he whispered, "An *IceWing."*

She whacked him with her tail and he yelped. "Seriously, though," she said. "Do you recognize him?"

Deathbringer investigated the corpse a bit more, then frowned. "I think it's Startail," he said slowly. "The guards told me about him. Obsidian and Darkclaws are not going to be happy."

Glory nodded solemnly. "Let's take her to the infirmary," she said. "We'll see if there's anything to be done."

Deathbringer bowed his head and snapped his claws. Four RainWings materialized out of nowhere and descended towards the body of Startail.

"Oh, and Deathbringer," said Glory. The NightWing turned around from escorting the RainWings to the infirmary. Suddenly she was torn on what to tell him.

She had an impulse, and she had a reasonable option.

She chose reasonable.

"Check on the wingery," she said. "See how the Jade Winglet is going."

He nodded and flapped off, but Glory stood there for a few minutes, thinking to hide what she wanted to think about – Deathbringer.

When she had just settled onto her throne, her idiotic bodyguard burst in, wings flared in a panic.

"They're gone!" he shouted. "That IceWing-"

"Winter," said Glory.

"-Winter," said Deathbringer, "blasted a hole in the wall! They've-"

"Escaped," finished Glory. She moved Silver onto the ground and spread her wings. Deathbringer nodded frantically. "Is there any evidence as to where they went?"

Deathbringer paused. "Heh. I didn't check," he said sheepishly.

Glory closed her eyes for a moment.

"Alright, I was in a hurry," said the assassin. "Plus, there were about fifty shrieking tiny dragonets." He shivered.

"Let's go," said Glory. "Banana, Heliconia, Dragonfruit. Come."

Deathbringer lead the way, flapping in a hilariously panicked way. The three RainWings glided along behind Glory, casually, as if they had all the time in the world. Glory took her time, but hurried as well.

It was true – the wingery wall had a frozen hole through it. Deathbringer landed on a platform and started talking with the guards while Glory and the RainWings examined for clues.

"So what are we doing again?" asked Banana.

"Spread out," Glory said to them. "Find clues,"

Dragonfruit and Banana frowned at the ground below.

"Hey," asked Dragonfruit. "Isn't it funny how there's this trail of hibiscus flowers?"

"Yeah! Hilarious!" said Banana. There was a pause while they both looked at Heliconia, who was *actually doing her job.*

"By any chance," said Glory, "Do you think those flowers could have been *put* there?"

"Oh," said Banana.

"Maybe," said Dragonfruit.

"We should do that."

"Yeah. Maybe with chrysanthemums or something," mused Banana.

Glory soared down to the bottom of the rainforest, ignoring them for now. It definitely looked dragonmade, laid out like it was meant to be followed. And it started right below the wingery...

She smiled. Kinkajou hadn't betrayed her. And now they knew where they went.

Chapter 6: The Island

Deathbringer swooped into the tunnel clearing. This part of the jungle still smelt uncomfortably like the NightWing island, and always reminded him of it. He landed and looked around. Glory was giving orders to seven RainWings who were holding dart pouches with slightly more confidence than most. Deathbringer tried really hard to remember the names of the RainWings, but when they changed colors so frequently it made it difficult.

"Deathbringer, about time," said Glory, ushering the RainWings to the tunnel entrance. She was stone grey, but he noticed small swirls of pale green through her wings and ruff. *She must be more worried about Kinkajou than I thought.*

"Hey," he said, catching her eye. "It's going to be fine. Kinkajou can take care of herself."

"Unlike some dragons I know," Glory replied. "But Icicle *is* dangerous. So the quicker we take care of her, the better."

"Count on me," Deathbringer said, grinning. "When have I ever let you down?"

"How much time do you have?" said Glory, cracking a hint of a smile. Deathbringer crinkled his snout at her and she gave him a exaggeratedly hard look.

"Uh, your Majesty?" asked one of the RainWings. He was holding a blowdart with a vaguely confused expression. "Which ones are we shooting again?"

"The female IceWing." Glory said. Her scales slid back to dark grey and her smile faded. Deathbringer flicked his tail.

"Yeah, okay. So... IceWings. They're, like, the blue ones, right? "

"I'm pretty sure that's SeaWings," interjected another.

"Both can be blue," said Glory. "But the one we're getting is white. And it's the female one, so don't go shooting Kinkajou's friend."

"Right, right. I get it," said the first guard, looking very much like he did not.

"Time to go," Glory muttered to herself. "Alright, everyone. Do you all have your blowdarts?"

There was a round of affirmations from the RainWings, half of whom were poking at frogs or examining flowers. But Deathbringer noticed they did all have their weapons and were even holding them with some level of seriousness.

"Fantastic, then," she said. "Let's go. Remember, *camouflage.* We can't let Icicle know we're here."

Deathbringer considered reasurring her again, but decided against it and took the lead into the tunnel. It was dark and claustrophobic, and reminded him too much of the NightWing island. He remembered walking those cramped halls with Quickstrike, off to training again, or to the queen's chambers to learn how the council worked. Or to any of the horrible places filled with lava and smoke and the smell of death.

He shook his wings out and took a few deep breaths. That was over now. He wasn't trapped under the claws of Battlewinner or Morrowseer or anyone. He had a new life, and a new purpose.

He glanced at Glory, who was at the back of the procession. Her face was set, but he knew her well enough to notice the little nervous flick of her tail and the quick streaks of greengage that were quickly melted away. She was good at hiding it, but he knew she was more worried about Kinkajou than she'd ever admit.

Deathbringer reached the end of the tunnel and scanned the island. The entire top of the volcano had collapsed, destroying most of the fortress and making the whole place smaller. The remains of the

cinder forests were gone, submerged in cooled lava floes. Deathbringer wouldn't miss it - he remembered the island prey in much too vivid detail for his taste.

"Go ahead," said Glory, nudging him out of the way so the rest of the RainWings could spill out from the tunnel. "Find them. Then we'll come in with the blowdarts."

He nodded and took to the sky, blending into the black smog and dreary overcast. The smell of burnt scales was horribly clear in the smoke - he knew it well from the various dragons executed in the queen's throne room, including Vengeance. Deathbringer tried to shake out the memories, unsuccessfully.

Focusing on the mission instead, he angled himself for a long, lazy swoop around the volcano, watching the shale slides and crumbled fortresses for any sign of glinting white or sandy yellow scales. Nothing... nothing... wait. There was a glint of something shiny, like a tail, disappearing into one of the caves.

Deathbringer checked to make sure no one was following the IceWing, and then arrowed into the nextdoor cave. He had to hope his scales hid him well enough. This cave was used for the RainWing prisoners, so it should connect to the chasm in the middle...

A sudden flicker of motion made Deathbringer freeze in his tracks. His instincts told him to hide, but he steeled his nerves and breathed a plume of flame to illuminate the cave. It wasn't an IceWing... it looked like some sort of treasure hidden inbetween the rocks. He pried it out of the wall and examined it with curiosity. It was a long, simple necklace with a singular silver ring attach to it. A weird piece of jewelry - it wasn't particularly ostentatious or made of a rare metal.

Unless... this necklace looked familiar. He tried to remember Quickstrike's lessons about the other tribes of Pyrrhia. IceWings were particularly fond of silver, as he recalled, and there was certainly none of it on the NightWing island. *She's here.*

Deathbringer shook off the chills that slithered through his wings

and down his tail. He was fairly sure he could handle Icicle in a fight - and really, a NightWing should have no problem in the dark. It was just something about the acrid smell of RainWing venom, and the feeling of being utterly alone in the place where his nightmares had been staged all his life that made him feel strangely nervous as he proceeded further into the cave. Not *scared,* exactly, just... strange.

To be fair, though, the chasm that connected all the prisoner caves wasn't dark. It was lit by the warm glow of a lava flow somewhere deep below, and the ceiling had collapsed on one side into a huge shale slide that angled towards the volcano's top. Deathbringer felt his eyes adjust as he moved onto a sturdy-looking outcropping, studying the other caves for any sign of IceWings.

Suddenly, a noise made him freeze. He held his breath as what sounded like faint conversation whistled in from the collapsed ceiling. An argument, to be exact. He spread his wings and glided to a higher ledge, next to the shale slide. A few meters above him, a flight ledge connected to a cave entrance.

He heard the flapping of wings, and there was definitely talking - he recognized the posh IceWing accent of Winter, as well as Kinkajou. "It isn't?" squeaked the RainWing. "Why not?"

"There was a city before this one," explained the NightWing. "The NightWings used to live somewhere on the continent, back in Darkstalker's time. But they fled their city after he was - one he was gone - and they came here."

Deathbringer glanced down and though he saw something like a dragon dart across the chasm below him, from one cave dangerously near the lava flow. He glimpsed scuffed white scales against the warm orange backdrop. The sounds of serrated claws on stone.

Icicle was here. And she was coming for them.